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The Orasac Villager and the World Outside

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THE COMMUNITY

A Comparative Perspective

EDITED BY

Robert Mills French
Florida State University



W. E. PEACOCK PUBLISHERS, INC.
ITASCA ILLINOIS

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Preface

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Preface

The final section: "The Community and the Larger World" deals with the changes that have affected all mankind. The awakening to larger cultural horizons of men who have been introduced to other ways is a common theme of social scientists—this theme takes on more meaning as the following pages demonstrate, the community has been studied by many researchers in many different societies. To attempt to present a comprehensive collection of existing community studies in a single volume would be impossible. Even to attempt to cover the studies within a given society would be difficult if not impossible. This collection makes no pretense to comprehensiveness, rather, it is representative of the rich variety of materials that are available to the student of the community.

The comparative perspective of this volume takes the reader to American, Canadian, and several European societies and in so doing, demonstrates the variations and similarities among communities and their problems. The comparative base could be extended to studies of Asian, African, and Latin American communities but this would be the subject of another volume. Comparability of the communities in this volume is simplified inasmuch as all share some facets of European culture.

The book is divided into three major subject categories. The first section: "The Community as an Object of Study" deals with definitions of community and how to study it. The comparative perspective which guides this book is spelled out in the introduction, and the differing perspectives of anthropologists and sociologists are presented in several readings. The object of this presentation is not to argue who has the

proper methods of study, but rather, to demonstrate how each approach adds a special dimension to our understanding of the community.

The second section: "Bases of Community Organization" presents a variety of studies that show differing dominant themes of communities. What creates "community," or perhaps, what holds a group of people together in a certain pattern which we identify as a community, is the subject of this section. Family ties are important for some communities but actually tend to destroy the basis of other communities' existence. Similar cultural heritage draws many people together, but rancorous ethnic conflict between groups can also create "community." What this section demonstrates is that any simplistic explanation of "why communities" must fail, for just as Durkheim discovered that differing causes of suicide in fact indicate different kinds of suicide, so too an examination of the bases for communities indicates that there are several kinds of community. This presentation is intended to be a modest step toward the creation of a typology of communities. This does not mean that similarities among communities of several types are to be overlooked; indeed, such similarities would be the true "universals" that students of the community seek.

The final section: "The Community and the Larger World" deals with the changes that have affected all mankind. The awakening to larger cultural horizons of men who have been introduced to other ways is a common theme of social scientists—this theme takes on more meaning when it is presented in the context of what Serbian peasants or a French-Canadian community experience. That change has some costs to traditional ways and communities is attested to by the selections on economic pressures from the outside world and those that deal with migration. Certainly no student of the traditional community should be unaware of the threat to its very existence. More than any other single factor, the threat to the existence of the small community from pressures exerted by outside forces (metropolitan, national and even international) makes all the communities presented in these pages similar. The intention of the editor is not to call to arms the champions of small community life, but rather, to bring attention to, and illustrate, the great change taking place in society. The study of the community is important if only because it enables us to observe this transformation more readily than any other approach.

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25. The Orašac Villager and the World Outside

JOEL MARTIN HALPERN

The universe of the Orašac peasant centers on his household, his neighborhood, his clan, and his village. The world outside the village is of secondary importance, although he is very much aware of it and interested in it. Toward each larger and more distant sphere of influence and association, from the relation of Orašac to its surrounding village and market town, to Šumadija and Serbia, to the rest of Yugoslavia, and to the vast world beyond, his feelings become less intense.

NEIGHBORING VILLAGES AND THE MARKET TOWN

Part of the peasant's fervent attachment to his own plot of land is projected to his immediate surroundings. Not only does he invariably say that his village is the best in the area, but he also feels that he personally would not be happy living elsewhere. People are inherently proud of what is theirs, an attitude brought out in conversations on almost any subject. Despite constant instruction on the values of industrialization, and professed desires to leave the village in order to better serve their country, this attitude is even reflected in the essays of many of the school

SOURCE: Reprinted with permission of the author and publisher from *A Serbian Village* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

children, who speak of their birthplace with the greatest attachment and affection.

It is not uncommon to hear a man from Orašac declare emphatically that he could never live in neighboring Kopljare village "because it is too flat there," and for the Kopljare man to reply that he could not possibly settle in Orašac "because of the hills," although a casual traveler finds it hard to see any great difference in the topography of the two villages.

* * *

A new settler is not quickly accepted by the traditional villagers. Some smaller clans have been in Orašac almost 25 years but are considered newcomers. There are also two families who moved to Orašac 30 years ago, from a Serbian village near the Bulgarian border. They are still referred to as "The Bulgarians." The ethnic German miners and the few Slovenes are thought of as temporary residents and have limited contact with the villagers. For the most part they do not venture away from the kolonija into the village proper. The village priest is known as *Crnogorac*, Montenegrin, since he recently came to Orašac from there, and a schoolboy whose parents were born in Bosnia is called *Bosanac* and ridiculed by his classmates because he speaks a slightly different dialect.

The Orašac peasant is parochial but in no sense isolated. His greatest degree of contact with the world outside the village, other than via the national institutions present in the village, is through Arandjelovac.¹ At least one and often two members of most households go to the market town every Friday. Some villagers have special customers to whom they bring a specified amount of kajmak, wine, or brandy each week, but most bring their produce to trade on the open market. Peasants buy and sell to one another as well as to the townsfolk. This is especially true in the sale of livestock. Continuing the theme of inter-village rivalry, a peasant will sooner trust a fellow villager than one from another hamlet. Before a livestock transaction occurs, the first question is not on the qualities of the animal under consideration but, "Which village are you from?"

The long, narrow row of shops lining the town's main street is occupied by various private craftsmen and several state-controlled stores. The peasants' purchasing of staples and certain consumer goods has already been discussed, but much of their town business is at the sandal-maker's, potter's or tanner's. The town has always supported a much greater variety of craftsmen than has the village. The variety of crafts still

¹ Orašac County is similar to most others in Šumadija in that it consists of a group of 20 or so villages oriented toward one small town which acts as both market and administrative center.

operating today reveals the extent to which the peasants depend on them. Other reasons for a trip to town are errands at the county seat, the court, the health clinic, or a visit to a relative.

The most important events attracting villagers into town are the *vašari*, the county fairs and livestock markets which occur several times a year. The fairs are arranged in a patterned fashion, with specified spots for the various activities. The Friday marketplace functions as usual, but the vacant lots and hills beyond are filled with the overflow of carts piled high with bulk produce, with a turbulent mass of squealing pigs, placid cows, and animated villagers, clinching bargains, amidst shouting and hand-slapping. Temporary stands are set up to sell household goods, such as tin and wooden utensils, made and sold by craftsmen from the South. The main feature of the fair is the amusement section, complete with games of chance and gypsy musicians. Afterwards there is traditionally a dance for the young people, around the town churchyard on another hill overlooking the market scene.

ŠUMADIJA AND SERBIA

Beyond the scope of the surrounding villages and market town, the peasant thinks in terms of Šumadija and Serbia. Within this sphere the Orašac peasant will insist that the region of the Jasenica basin is the best part of Šumadija.²

Šumadija in general has been a very homogeneous area during the last century and a half, although the composition of the population has altered slightly since the war. Most of the non-Serb population is concentrated in the towns. They include factory workers from other areas, a few Tsintsar merchants and a small group of Jewish professional and business people. Before the war the number of Jews was considerably higher, and many refugees were hidden in peasant cottages during the German occupation. In contrast to the traditions of distrust and anti-Semitism which exists in other parts of Eastern Europe, the Serbs in the towns and the peasants who came in contact with the Jews thought of them as clever, rich, and with "good souls." Two peasant households in Orašac still correspond with Jews whom they had sheltered in their homes and who later went to Israel.

There is one group of people counted in the official census as of Serb nationality and Orthodox religion whom the peasants nevertheless consider outsiders. It is the *Cigani*, the gypsies. In Šumadija there are

² The peasants of the Jasenica region regard those to the north, in the Kosmaj area, as not being true Šumadijans, calling them *Šijaci*. They consider themselves to be *Eroji*, true descendants of the Dinaric herdsmen, while they, in turn, are regarded as *Šijaci* by people further south.

actually two kinds of gypsies, the kind the Orašani refer to as "our gypsies" and the type that live in more southern parts of Šumadija and other areas of Serbia who are wandering smiths and entertainers.

The gypsies of the first type are sedentary. There are none in Orašac village, but there is a settlement of them in Ranilović, a small group in Kopljare, and a *Ciganska Mala*, or gypsy quarter, in Arandjelovac. They live much as the Serb peasantry does, speaking Serbian, observing slavas, and practicing both agriculture and herding to some extent. They are easily distinguished by their darker skin and other physical features. Despite their seeming adaptation to peasant life, they are rarely successful farmers and usually occupy the most marginal land. Their homes are shabby even when compared to the poorest peasant house. They supplement their income in other ways. The men make and repair various types of metal cooking utensils, and fashion such items as wool combers, wooden mixing troughs, spoons, spindles, and cheese boxes. In so doing they fulfill a distinct economic need and yet do not compete with any of the village or town craftsmen. This is also true of their other major occupation, that of serving as musicians, entertainers, and fortunetellers. Whatever else the peasant may say about gypsies, he is full of admiration for their ability as musicians, and the larger weddings in the village are frequently classified according to the number of gypsy musicians hired for the event.

The other type of gypsies, the nomadic ones, are also craftsmen and entertainers. Once or twice a year a caravan of several gypsy families passes through Orašac to sell kettles and frying pans and to tell fortunes by reading the future in a ball of fuzz plucked from the "client's" clothing. There is one group that brings a chained toothless dancing bear to the villages each year, making the animal perform in return for flour, bacon, beans, and dried meat. Money is rarely given. In the scattered villages of Šumadija, where entertainment is limited, the coming of these wandering gypsies is eagerly anticipated.

Despite the fact that the peasants consider the first type as their gypsies, all gypsies in general are regarded with condescension and suspicion. They are thought to be lazy, unreliable, and thieves. Villagers explain that they rarely leave their cottages unoccupied "because of the gypsies," and children are told, "If you're not good we'll give you to the gypsies" or "The gypsies will come and take you away."

To the Orašac villager Serbia is the logical extension of Šumadija, and he speaks with pride of Šumadija as the heart of Serbia. Although geographically this is so, the peasants have a somewhat different explanation, based on cultural traits. In the first place, "Šumadija is the most

desirable part of Serbia, the richest, most attractive area, and the home of the most *kulturni* people."

Being a Šumadinac, the Orašac peasant feels himself to be something of a privileged character, but basically he considers himself a Serb. He is passionately proud of his Serbia and will fight to defend it against all enemies, as has been amply demonstrated in the past 150 years. This great pride in nationality is no doubt due in part to the origin of Serbia as a peasant state.

Although the Orašani conceive of Šumadija as an integral part of Serbia it does not follow that they similarly conceive of Serbia as a part of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia is a political creation of the First World War, compounded of two small independent states, Serbia and Montenegro, and parts of the defunct Turkish and Austro-Hungarian Empires. The common bonds in all Yugoslavia are much less obvious than in the case of Serbia alone, or even Serbia and Montenegro, where the great majority of the people share a religion and historical tradition. Since the Serbs are by far the largest national unit in Yugoslavia, and also because they were an independent state for almost a hundred years before the creation of Yugoslavia, it has been rather difficult for them to think of Yugoslavia as a federal or multinational state. This led to severe tensions in the inter-war years. Although the present government is a federal state with individual constituent republics and although open conflict has been eliminated, the problem has by no means been completely solved.

* * *

THE REST OF YUGOSLAVIA

The inhabitants of Orašac are aware that they are formally citizens of Yugoslavia, but only the village intellectuals would speak of themselves as Yugoslavs or of their language as Serbo-Croatian. It is possible that this attitude will gradually change, for the idea of a united Yugoslavia and "the brotherhood of our peoples" is very strongly emphasized by the school and government organizations.

ORAŠAC AND THE WORLD BEYOND YUGOSLAVIA

Less than six copies of the two main Belgrade newspapers are received in the village each day, and there are only about 20 radios or crystal sets, so it is not surprising that the villagers' news of world developments is rather sketchy. At the same time, despite the fact that they are most preoccupied with earning a living and with local affairs, they have a very

definite interest in other parts of the world. To fail to mention this interest and indicate some of their feelings and attitudes on the subject would be to neglect a limited but significant aspect of their culture.

One of the primary stimuli for this interest has been the considerable periods spent by many village men abroad, as a result of military service. In the First World War they participated in campaigns in Albania and Greece, and by their imprisonment in Czechoslovakia they saw something of a different way of life. In the Second World War 70 Orašac men spent the war in German prison camps with British, French, and American soldiers, while others fought with the partisans when they cooperated with the Russians. This, added to the fact that Orašac itself has twice in this century been occupied by German armies, could not very well help but affect the outlook of the whole village. In the last century there were, of course, the wars against the Bulgarians and Turks.

Many of the younger villagers have been to the movies in Arandjelovac, where they have seen foreign films, including American ones. Their contacts are much more limited than those of the town children, however, for the latter were familiar with the term *kauboj* (cowboy) while village children had no idea what it meant. It is possible that with film showings at the village Cooperative Home there will be more consciousness of foreign countries in general. The films have the greatest effect on the younger generation. Many of the older people have never seen a motion picture and have no desire to do so, particularly since they must pay for the privilege.

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